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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 RANGOON 000579

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: DECL: 05/16/2014

TAGS: [PREL](#) [EAID](#) [KPAO](#) [KDEM](#) [BM](#) [NLD](#)

SUBJECT: NLD CHAIRMAN ON USG DEMOCRACY ASSISTANCE

Classified By: Carmen M. Martinez reason 1.4 (b, d)

1. (C) Summary: NLD Chairman Aung Shwe is taking an increasingly assertive position within the party as Aung San Suu Kyi remains isolated under strict house arrest. Aung Shwe endorsed opening a branch American Center in Mandalay to support democracy training beyond Rangoon and said he would soon nominate a second batch of NLD participants for the Professional Development Program, an ESF-funded stealth training program for the NLD conducted at the American Center. End Summary.

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NLD Chairman Steps Up  
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2. (C) PAO and DCM met with Chairman U Aung Shwe and Secretary U Lwin May 11 at the National League for Democracy

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headquarters to discuss USG support for pro-democracy activities. Aung Shwe was unusually animated and engaged emboffs on a wide range of specific issues without reference to notes or aides. His spirits seemed high and he exhibited his wry sense of humor on several occasions, including a quip about being too poor to shop at upscale City Mart, thus avoiding harm in the bloody blasts of May 7. In previous meetings U Aung Shwe was unwilling to make definitive commitments on issues, needing to defer to Aung San Suu Kyi's final say. As the terms of ASSK's house arrest have become increasingly stringent, the heretofore reticent chairman has finally begun playing a more forceful role in running the daily affairs of the party.

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Grateful for Democracy Training  
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3. (C) Aung Shwe told emboffs he is very pleased with the results of the Professional Development Program (PDP), which provides training for key NLD cadre. About twelve party members--all former political prisoners--participated in various elements of the first PDP session, with six managing to complete the entire two-year course. Aung Shwe said he would nominate a second batch of participants before the end of May. The NLD leaders said they looked forward to receiving PDP course materials translated into Burmese (a pending ESF-funded pro-democracy project) for distribution to NLD members elsewhere. While at NLD HQ, emboffs observed former PDP trainees conducting a human rights workshop for mid-level NLD members.

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Support for Mandalay  
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4. (C) The NLD Chairman noted that it is difficult for NLD members in central and northern regions to attend democracy training activities in Rangoon. Transport, lodging, and food expenses are beyond the reach of many NLD members. When reminded of plans to open a branch American Center in Mandalay, the NLD chairman said, "That's a good idea. It would be very helpful."

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Burmese Hoosiers  
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5. (C) The PAO also briefed the NLD leaders about the successful launch of another ESF-funded training program, a correspondence course enabling pro-democracy youth (who the regime would prohibit from traveling abroad) to earn Indiana University credits toward a college degree. The chairman was pleased to hear that this project, specifically requested by NLD General Secretary Aung San Suu Kyi, was up and running at the American Center. He promised to try to get word to ASSK with this news, but he acknowledged, "I don't know when that might be."

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ASSK Update  
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6. (C) In passing Aung Shwe mentioned that ASSK's doctor, who was supposed to have access to her May 10, had in fact not gotten in to see her. When emboffs pressed for details,

Aung Shwe recounted that the police said the doctor could only visit at some specified time in the afternoon. ASSK apparently objected, and the visit was cancelled. When emboffs asked if ASSK knew about the recent bombings, the NLD leaders said they thought she listened to the radio. They added that the party planned to mark her 60th birthday on June 19 by organizing a special donation of food to monks.

17. (C) Comment: Chairman Aung Shwe's decisive performance May 11 was a welcomed change from the lassitude we have often encountered at NLD HQ in Aung San Suu Kyi's absence. His strongly voiced support for expanded ESF-funded democracy training programs inside Burma echoed Aung San Suu Kyi's previously expressed keen interest in these programs. End comment.  
Martinez